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ABSTRACT

This publication analyzes issues that lead to a working definition of soft working skills. Data come from research by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. At a workshop, scholars, practitioners, and representatives from various job sites discussed the impact of soft skills on access to jobs and long-term employment among minority youth. Workshop participants identified many issues that required further examination. Part 1 of this report, "Soft Skills and the Minority Work Force: An Analysis," explores these issues by constructing a definition of soft skills and using that definition to investigate employer demand for soft skills, the soft skills of minority workers relative to other entry level workers, and the importance of soft skills in explaining the labor market problems of African American youth. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on what soft skills are, whether soft skills matter, whether soft skills influence minority hiring decisions, and whether there is a soft skills deficit among minorities. Part 2, "Soft Skills: An Annotated Bibliography," offers summary descriptions of many articles and publications on the subject. (Contains 44 references.) (SM)

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Soft Skills and the Minority Work Force:

A Guide for Informed Discussion

Cecilia A. Conrad

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Joint Center for Political & Economic Studies

Soft Skills and the Minority Work Force:

A Guide for Informed Discussion

by Cecilia A. Conrad

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Washington, DC

1999

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies informs and illuminates the nation's major public policy debates through research, analysis, and information dissemination in order to: Improve the socioeconomic status of black Americans; Expand their effective participation in the political and public policy arenas; and Promote communications and relationships across racial and ethnic lines to strengthen the nation's pluralistic society.

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Foreword

Regardless of the future state of the economy, some members of the work force will have more difficulty than others finding and keeping jobs because they lack the skills that employers require of their workers. Unfortunately, many minorities will find the challenge daunting, as evidenced by the fact that minority unemployment rates are much higher than those of white non-Hispanic workers. Traditionally, educators and training providers have helped to prepare people to compete in the labor market by teaching general literacy and job-specific skills. Today, however, employers are increasingly saying that these skills are not enough. The people they hire must have "soft skills" as well.

But what are soft skills? While many use the term, it has been difficult to find a useful definition. Without such a definition, it is harder for training providers to develop curricula to teach the newly required skills. Among those particularly concerned with solving this problem are the people operating the Annie E. Casey Foundation Jobs Initiative. In order to assist them, the foundation invited scholars, practitioners, and representatives from its six Jobs Initiative sites to a workshop in Philadelphia in June 1997 to discuss the impact of soft skills on access to jobs and long-term employment among urban minority workers.

As an outgrowth of this workshop, the foundation asked the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies for assistance in defining soft skills and in identifying programs that teach them so that participants in the foundation's Jobs Initiative could be better prepared for employment opportunities in their respective communities. This report, *Soft Skills and the Minority Work Force*, is the first of two publications completed with the foundation's support. The second, *Soft Skills Training: An Annotated Guide to Selected Programs*, is a companion publication that summarizes the training currently being offered by selected programs around the country. Part I of *Soft Skills and the Minority Work Force* is an analysis of the issues that leads to a working definition of soft skills. Part II is an annotated bibliography that was developed in conjunction with the Jobs Initiative's second work readiness conference, held in Seattle, Washington, in October 1997.

The Joint Center has been pleased to undertake this work for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, in part because it is closely related to our larger research agenda on preparing African American workers for the jobs of the new millennium. We hope that this report and its companion publication, *Soft Skills Training*, will be of value to a broad group of policymakers, policy influentials, employers, and training providers who will be involved in training, shaping, and hiring the work force of the future. We thank the Annie E. Casey Foundation for supporting the research and preparation of the documents for publication and both the Casey Foundation and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for covering the cost of printing and disseminating the documents to their interested audiences.

Eddie N. Williams
President

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Introduction

Several studies of employer attitudes have found that negative stereotypes about the "soft skills" of urban minority workers, especially African American males, are widespread. These findings are particularly alarming, because employers seem to regard soft skills as an increasingly important consideration in their hiring decisions. As a result, this soft skills deficit—whether real or imagined—could pose a major employment obstacle for low-skilled, minority workers. Unfortunately, the absence of a precise definition of soft skills makes it difficult to assess their importance in the employment problems of urban youth. "Soft skills" tends to be a catch-all category. All attributes or traits not elsewhere classified are considered soft skills. One danger of such a sweeping definition is that it can be difficult to distinguish the soft skills deficit of an employee from racial discrimination by the employer.

This study of the soft skills issue was commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in connection with a larger initiative. The foundation has initiated projects in six cities—Denver, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Seattle—to connect residents of disadvantaged communities with jobs. As part of this initiative, in June 1997, the foundation invited scholars, practitioners, and representatives from the six Casey Jobs Initiative sites to a workshop in Philadelphia to discuss the impact of soft skills on access to jobs and long-term employment among urban minority workers.

The Philadelphia workshop participants identified a number of issues that required further examination. The Analysis in Part I of this report is an effort to explore those issues by constructing a definition of soft skills and then using that definition to investigate employer demand for soft skills, the soft skills of minority workers relative to other entry level workers, and the importance of soft skills in explaining the labor market problems of African American youth. Accordingly, the analysis is organized around four key questions:

- What are soft skills?
- Do soft skills matter?
- Do soft skills influence minority hiring decisions?
- Is there a soft skills deficit among minorities?

The first question is particularly significant because a precise definition of soft skills is a prerequisite for developing rigorous assessment, evaluation, and training programs. An explicit and consistent definition of soft skills, moreover, will help guide and inform research on their importance in explaining urban youth employment problems and also help identify situations where a claimed lack of soft skills is actually a pretense for employment discrimination.

The definition of soft skills presented here is derived from a survey of the relevant academic and business literature.

Consultations with employers and job training program administrators provided additional validation. Using this formal definition, the report addresses the remaining questions by analyzing research findings on the influence of soft skills on employment and earnings. The report concludes with a summary of those findings and their implications for the Casey Jobs Initiative sites.

The Annotated Bibliography that makes up Part II of this guide offers summary descriptions of many of these articles and other publications, some of which may prove to be as useful to the reader as they were to the author of this study.

Part 1. Soft Skills and the Minority Work Force: An Analysis

Part I.
Soft Skills and the Minority Work Force: An Analysis

What Are Soft Skills?

The precise origin of the term "soft skills" remains uncertain. The earliest reference was discovered in military training documents from the early 1970s. Since the 1980s, business periodicals in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain have published articles on the soft skills that managers need to have and the merits of assessing those skills. More recent studies and articles have addressed the demand for soft skills among entry level workers.

Despite its widespread usage, formal definitions of the term "soft skills" are scarce. The few definitions offered, moreover, tend to use vague descriptors such as "people skills" (Project WILD Handbook 1997). Other definitions treat soft skills as a catch-all for myriad worker characteristics. Philip Moss and Chris Tilly (1996), for example, define soft skills as "skills, abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than to formal or technical knowledge."

The absence of a precise definition impedes a meaningful assessment of the importance of soft skills in the employment problems of urban youth. Without a specific list of skills that are soft, it is difficult to assess an individual worker's stock of those skills. Furthermore, a sweeping definition of soft skills makes it difficult to distinguish an employee's soft skills deficit from an employer's discriminatory practices.

The military, not surprisingly, offers a very precise definition of soft skills, but one with limited applicability. In a 1972 training manual, the U.S. Army defines soft skills as "job-related skills involving actions affecting primarily people and paper, e.g., inspecting troops, supervising office personnel, conducting studies, preparing maintenance reports, preparing efficiency reports, designing bridge structures" (Fry and Whitmore 1972). Even within the military, however, this definition did not accurately reflect daily usage of the term among army officers. For example, while the official army definition categorized "reading a map" as a soft skill, officers at the U.S. Continental Army Command (CONARC) did not. Based on their interviews with these officers, researchers John Fry and Paul Whitmore (1972) learned that officers distinguished between skills that involved the performance of specific tasks, such as reading a map, and skills that required the exercise of personal judgment about the tasks to be performed. The officers felt that reading a map was not a soft skill because it involved a specific action with known consequences. If the map were read incorrectly, the unit would get lost.

In contrast, the application of a skill that is unequivocally soft, such as the ability to motivate troops, involves considerable uncertainty. While it is quite possible to define a priori the precise steps required for "reading a map," it is impossible to do so for "motivating troops." Based on their findings, Fry and Whitmore proposed an alternative to the Army's definition of soft skills. They defined soft skills as important job-

related skills that "(1) involve little or no interaction with machines; (2) do not involve performance of specific tasks; and (3) involve a physical and social environment that is uncertain or a situation where the consequences of alternative courses of action are unknown."

The Army's primary interest was the soft skills of its leadership, and this is true of other references to soft skills as well. Although these articles characterize a variety of specific skills as "soft," they are primarily relevant for management and professional workers. The soft skills identified in this literature include communication skills (Appleton 1997; Caminiti 1995; Davis 1993; Dutton 1994; Filipczak 1996; Pine and Tingley 1993); team leadership and team building skills, (Appleton 1997; Caminiti 1995; Crawford 1994; Pine and Tingley 1993; Dutton 1994; Mirabile, Caldwell and O'Reilly 1987); interpersonal skills (Strebler 1997; Cafasso 1996); and the ability to manage change (Littlefield 1995).

Comparatively few studies attempt to define soft skills in the context of entry level workers. One is the Moss and Tilly (1996) study cited previously, which proposed a very broad definition of soft skills. Another study, by Peter Capelli and Maria Ianozzi (1995), divides soft skills into three categories of work-relevant attitudes: "disposition or personality, motivation, and willingness to sacrifice self for the good of the group." In a paper on job retention among former welfare recipients, Judith Combes Taylor (1997) distinguishes between tier one and tier two soft skills. Tier one includes soft skills such as the ability to report for work regularly and on time, the ability to follow relatively complex instructions from supervisors or co-workers, and the ability to interact with other employees and external contacts in ways that minimize disruptive conflict. Tier two soft skills involve problem solving and reasoning abilities. In face-to-face interviews, employers focused on punctuality, attendance, and personal habits, including nonverbal communication, dress, and hair style (Moss and Tilly 1995, 1996; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Kirschenman, Moss, and Tilly 1995).

These diverse definitions of soft skills share some common elements, however. There is a general consensus that (1) soft skills involve interactions with people, not machines; (2) soft skills tend to be environment specific; and (3) soft skills are difficult to assess. Marie Strebler (1997) reports the findings of a survey of 184 managers across five employers in Great Britain. The managers complained about the difficulty of evaluating soft skills when given vague behavioral descriptors such as "likes dealing with people." Assessment is also difficult because soft skills tend to be situation specific. Strebler's report included the observation that "individuals related to others in different ways because of the context of their situation." Commenting on the problem of assessing the soft skills of army officers, Paul Whitmore (1972) observed, "Whether or not a worker behaves in a 'motivated' fashion depends largely on how other people in his work environment treat him."

Discussions with Casey Jobs Initiative site representatives and others reveal a similar consensus. At the 1997 Jobs Initiative Conference in Seattle, participants in the soft skills workshop suggested definitions of soft skills ranging from "nontechnical work behaviors" to "ability to interact with others and observe corporate culture and learn from it in order to gain advancement and success." Casey site representatives, including one participant who defined soft skills as "behavior modification and assimilation," emphasized the importance of being able to adapt to new situations.

Based on published references to soft skills and discussions with Casey site repre-

sentatives and others, this report defines soft skills as nontechnical skills, abilities and traits required to function in a specific (structured) employment environment so as to (1) deliver information or services to customers and co-workers; (2) work effectively as a member of a team; (3) learn or acquire the technical skills required to perform a task; and (4) inspire confidence of supervisors and management; and (5) understand and adapt to the cultural norms of the workplace.

Soft skills comprise four workplace competencies: thinking and cognitive skills; oral communication skills; personal qualities and work ethic; and interpersonal and teamwork skills. Table 1 outlines the elements of each of these workplace competencies. For each soft skill, Table 2 provides references to specific citations in the literature.

Thinking and Cognitive Skills

Thinking and cognitive skills include the ability to identify problems and evaluate alternative solutions, weighing their risks and benefits. Since cognitive skill is so difficult to measure, assessments are often based on the results of standardized tests of traditional academic skills such as mathematics. Because cognitive skill is abstract rather than concrete, however, scholars and job training practitioners classify it as a soft skill. In the management literature, Fry and Whitmore (1972) stress cognitive skills in their study of soft skills training for army officers, and Michael Crawford (1994) includes cognitive skills in a discussion of soft skills training in MBA programs. In the literature on entry level workers, Taylor (1997) classifies cognitive reasoning as a tier two soft skill. Home Care Associates of Philadelphia, an affiliate of the Casey Jobs Initiative in Philadelphia, equates soft skill development with cognitive modeling in its training materials. In Denver, the development of problem solving skills is the cornerstone of the Casey site's soft skills curriculum, "Working It Out." Jim Milner of the Milwaukee Casey site emphasizes the need to "teach people to think differently" or, more specifically, to "teach people to think strategically" as an essential component of a soft skills curriculum.

Oral Communication Skills

Oral communication skills comprise both listening and speaking skills. They include the ability to understand and give instructions, as well as the ability to communicate in oral messages appropriate to listeners and the situation. In most work environments, the appropriate mode of oral communication is standard English; however, this definition recognizes that in some environments, Spanish or even "street language" might be acceptable.

Personal Qualities and Work Ethic

Personal qualities are attributes that are the components of a work ethic. They include attributes such as self-esteem, motivation to work, and willingness to learn. This report excludes specific work habits, such as punctuality, attendance, and appropriate dress and grooming, which often appear in other skill inventories. The National Academy of Sciences, for example, includes "appropriate dress and grooming," "appropriate personal hygiene," and "freedom from substance abuse" in the "Personal Work Habits" category of its inventory of workplace competencies (O'Neil, Alfred, and Baker 1993). Casey site representatives argue that these work habits are not soft skills but rather the product of soft skills. For example, appropriate dress is a result of self-esteem and motivation to work. A motivated worker who can identify and solve

Table 1. Soft Skills Taxonomy

Thinking/Cognitive Skills

- Identifies problems
- Considers and evaluates alternative solutions, weighing their risks and benefits
- Formulates and reaches decisions logically
- Separates fact from opinion
- Adjusts to unanticipated situations by applying established rules and facts
- Works out new ways of handling recurring problems
- Determines what is needed to accomplish work assignments

Oral Communication Skills

- Communicates in oral messages appropriate to listeners and situations
- Understands and gives instructions
- Obtains, clarifies, and verifies information through questioning

Personal Qualities/Work Ethic

- Displays self-esteem
- Knows self-management
- Takes responsibility
- Expresses willingness to learn
- Is motivated
- Understands need for organization, supervision, rules, policies, and procedures

Interpersonal/Teamwork Skills

- Conducts self according to the expressed or unexpressed norms of a group and participates according to his or her talents
- Demonstrates respect for opinions, customs, and individual differences of others
- Handles conflict maturely
- Participates in group decisions
- Appreciates the importance and value of humor
- Offers and accepts criticism constructively

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Table 2. References to Specific Soft Skills

	Managerial, Professional, and Technical Workers	Other Workers, Including Entry Level Employees
Thinking/Cognitive Skills	*Problem solving*—Crawford 1994; Fry and Whitmore 1972; Pine and Tingley 1993. *Change management*—Littlefield 1995. *Analytical thinking*—Mirabile, Caldwell, and O'Reilly 1987. *Problem Solving*—Taylor 1997.	
Oral Communication	Appleton 1997; Caminiti 1995; Davis 1993; Dutton 1994; Filipczak 1996; Pine and Tingley 1993; Strebler 1997; Wilson 1997.	Carnevale 1991; Moss and Tilly 1995; Murnane and Levy 1996; Taylor 1997.
Personal Qualities/ Work Ethic		*Motivation*—Cappelli and Iannozzi 1995; Moss and Tilly 1995, 1996. *Responsibility, dependability, conscientiousness*—Cappelli and Iannozzi 1995. *Punctuality*—Taylor 1997. *Self-management and self-esteem*—Carnevale 1991. *Nonverbal communication, "style"*—Moss and Tilly 1995, 1996.
Interpersonal and Teamwork Skills	*Team building skills*—Appelton 1997; Caminiti 1995; Crawford 1994; Dutton 1994; Mirabile, Caldwell, and O'Reilly 1987; Pine and Tingley 1993. *Conflict resolution*—Caminiti 1995; Filipczak 1996. *Leadership and coaching ability*—Crawford 1994; Filipczak 1996; Strebler 1997; Wilson 1997. *Managing diversity*—Dutton 1994. *General interpersonal skills*—Cafasso 1996.	*General interpersonal skills* —Capelli and Iannozzi 1995; Carnevale 1991; Moss and Tilly 1995, 1996; Project WILD Handbook 1997; Taylor 1997.

problems will figure out how to arrive at work on time. Even employers who describe punctuality and appropriate dress and grooming as soft skills often acknowledge that they use these behaviors to make inferences about an individual's motivation to work (Gifford, Ng, and Wilkinson 1985).

Interpersonal and Teamwork Skills

In some ways, interpersonal and teamwork skills encompass all the other workplace competencies. These skills include the ability to negotiate, to participate as a member of a team, to serve and satisfy the expectations of clients and customers, and to resolve conflicts maturely. Teamwork requires good speaking and listening skills, strong self-esteem coupled with a sense of responsibility, and the cognitive skills to recognize group norms. While the first three categories of soft skills refer primarily to attributes of the individual, interpersonal and teamwork skills also depend on attributes of the worker's environment. Relevant attributes include the physical environment, the type of work, and the personalities and attitudes of fellow workers. Even if minority workers are willing to adapt to the corporate culture, they may have difficulty functioning as effective team members if co-workers or supervisors are unwilling to accept them.

As Table 2 illustrates, personal qualities are rarely mentioned in the context of managerial, professional, and technical workers, but frequently mentioned in the context of entry level workers. In contrast, cognitive skills are most often cited in the context of management and professional workers. This pattern is consistent with Taylor's (1997) concept of tier one and tier two soft skills. Several participants at the Seattle Jobs Initiative conference also distinguished tiers of soft skills. They drew a distinction between the soft skills required to get a job and those required to keep a job. Communication skills, interpersonal skills, and personal qualities are critical in getting a job. Cognitive skills help the worker to keep that job.

This list of specific soft skills can now be used to shape and structure research into the importance of a "soft skills" deficit in explaining the employment problems of urban youth, particularly young black males.

Do Soft Skills Matter?

Conclusions about the importance of soft skills in the hiring of minority workers hinge on a comprehensive assessment of employer demand for soft skills. Employers say that soft skills matter. In national inventories of the skills needed for employment, in surveys of employers in specific industries and occupations, and in surveys of employers of entry level workers, employers consistently list communication skills, interpersonal skills, and cognitive or problem solving skills as critical for work force productivity. Not only do employers say that soft skills matter, they act as if soft skills matter. Experimental evidence confirms that soft skills affect the ratings of job applicants, and empirical studies show that workers with soft skills earn higher pay.

Three national studies have been conducted since 1990 by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), the American Society for Training and Development, and the National Academy of Sciences, which led to an inventory of the skills that American workers need to be competitive in the world economy. The SCANS project, commissioned by the U.S. Secretary of Labor, convened discussions and meetings with business owners, public employers, unions, workers, and supervisors in

shops, plants, and stores (SCANS 1992). Although the SCANS study does not use the term "soft skills," one of the five workplace competencies it identifies is interpersonal skills. The exercise of interpersonal skills requires that a worker (a) participate as a member of a team, (b) teach others new skills, (c) serve clients and customers, (d) exercise leadership, (e) negotiate, and (f) work with diversity. All of these skills fit the definition of soft skills presented in this report. In addition, the SCANS project identifies a three-part basic foundation that each worker must have: basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic, mathematics, listening, and speaking); thinking skills; and personal qualities. Each part of this basic foundation includes skills that are soft.

In another study of the skills required of the U.S. work force, the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) conducted extensive on-site and telephone interviews with employers nationwide (Carnevale 1991). From these interviews, ASTD identified seven skill groups, four of which are soft: communication and adaptability skills (problem solving and thinking creatively); development skills (self-esteem, motivation and goal setting, career development); group effectiveness skills (interpersonal skills, teamwork, negotiation); and influencing skills (understanding organizational culture, sharing leadership).

The National Academy of Sciences assessed the skills required of high school graduates who enter the work force immediately after graduation (O'Neil, Alfred, and Baker 1993). A panel of employers, labor union representatives, scholars, and educators identified 10 "core competencies" required of all entry level workers. Three of the core competencies are soft skills: oral communications, interpersonal relationships, and personal work habits.

Similar assessments have been conducted at the state and local level. Kevin Hollenbeck's (1994) study of employers in Kalamazoo, Michigan, found broad agreement that soft skills were important, but wide variation in the relative importance of specific soft skills across economic sectors and occupation groups. Representatives from the retail, health, and education sectors emphasized appropriate dress, while those from the manufacturing, nonprofit, and service sectors rated appropriate dress as less important. Hollenbeck's (1994) study also includes a concise survey of studies conducted at the state level. In a survey of employers of clerical workers in California, Virginia Gaustad (1988) found that the soft skills required of clerk typists differed from those required of secretaries.

In addition to these skill inventories, several studies have focused specifically on the skills required of entry level employees. In the Moss and Tilly (1995) study, 86 percent of employers included soft skills on their list of most important hiring criteria. Harry Holzer (1996) surveyed employers in four metropolitan areas (Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles) about the skills needed for recently filled jobs that did not require a college diploma. Holzer identified the importance of particular skills by asking how often a worker would have to perform specific tasks such as dealing with customers on the phone or in person, reading paragraphs, writing paragraphs, doing arithmetic, and using computers. Holzer found that more than 50 percent of the jobs required the social and interpersonal skills needed to deal with customers.

The fact that employers use the personal interview to screen entry level workers corroborates the survey evidence that soft skills matter. Holzer found that employers used a personal interview to screen applicants for 87 percent of noncollege jobs in central cities and suburbs. Even for unskilled, blue collar job openings, more than

80 percent required an interview. The personal interview permits a direct assessment of the job candidate's communication skills and knowledge of appropriate dress and grooming. While communication skills have the greatest influence on an applicant's rating, interviewers also use nonverbal cues to infer other attributes (Gifford, Ng, and Wilkinson 1985; Parsons and Liden 1984). Interviewers infer energy level and motivation from smiles, hands and body movement, and time spent talking. Because the personal interview is costly, its prevalence suggests that soft skills affect the employer's bottom line.

Employers also seem willing to pay a wage premium to workers with specific soft skills. Although no studies have assessed the impact of "street talk" or other dialects on earnings, Alberto Davila, Alok Bohara, and Rogelio Saenz (1993) found that Mexican Americans who speak English with an accent earn significantly lower wages than those who speak without an accent. Arthur Goldsmith, Jonathan Veum, and William A. Darity, Jr. (1997) observed that employers pay higher wages to workers with high self-esteem. (Conversely, higher wages lead to higher self-esteem. To separate these effects, Goldsmith et al. correlated a pre-labor-market measure of self-esteem with labor-market wages.) Employers also pay higher wages to workers with higher levels of cognitive ability, as measured by performance on standardized tests (Farkas et al. 1997).

Based on their survey responses as well as their actions, employers clearly place a high value on soft skills. Having established that soft skills do matter, the next step is to explore whether minority workers are at a disadvantage in the workplace because they lack these soft skills.

Do Soft Skills Influence Minority Hiring?

It is clear that negative stereotypes of minority workers are widespread. Less clear is whether minority workers actually possess fewer soft skills than other entry level workers and whether employers actually fail to hire minority workers because they lack soft skills.

In face-to-face interviews, urban employers frequently express negative opinions about the soft skills of African American and Hispanic workers. Moss and Tilly (1995, 1996) conducted 66 interviews with employer representatives at 55 organizations in Detroit and Los Angeles in 1991 and 1992. Thirty-two percent of those interviewed described black men as defensive, hostile, and having a "difficult attitude." Forty percent described black men as unmotivated employees. Joleen Kirschenman and Kathryn Neckerman (1991) interviewed 185 employers in Chicago and elsewhere in Cook County between July 1988 and March 1989. When asked about differences in the work ethics of whites, blacks, and Hispanics, 37.7 percent ranked blacks last and 1.4 percent ranked Hispanics last. For 7.6 percent of employers, blacks and Hispanics shared last place. No employer ranked whites last. The remaining 53.3 percent of respondents either saw no difference or refused to categorize by race. Employers characterized black workers as "having an attitude problem" and criticized their hair, dress, and style of language.

Although negative stereotypes are prevalent, not all employers express negative opinions of blacks. Based on interviews conducted in Atlanta, Georgia, researchers Kirschenman, Moss, and Tilly (1995) report several examples of positive stereotypes of minority inner city workers. For example, one operations executive for a grocery chain

commented, "In terms of work ethic, I would tell you probably [employees in] some of the inner city stores have a better work ethic than [those in] some of our northeast Atlanta stores." A manufacturing company supervisor admitted that a job applicant from an upper-income area may appear more polished than one from a low-income, black area. However, he also noted, "But the lower-income person may need the job more and be a more solid employee. If you hire both of them, the lower-income person, the black person or whatever may stick around longer and be a much more solid citizen than the upper-income person, because [the upper-income person] is always looking for something else to go to."

Despite the existence of negative stereotypes, Moss and Tilly (1995) found little empirical evidence to link an employer's demand for soft skills to his employment of minority workers. Using a multivariate analysis to explore the determinants of the racial composition of a firm's work force, they found that employers who listed soft skills as the most important quality sought in an applicant did not hire a significantly smaller proportion of black workers than other employers. Moss and Tilly also found that employers' negative perceptions of the soft skills of black men had no effect on the racial composition of their work forces.

How does one explain the absence of a link between soft skills and minority employment in a multivariate analysis given the prevalence of negative stereotypes among employers? Moss and Tilly argue that the problem is measurement error. "The variable in question, whether employers mentioned soft skills first in describing 'desired employee qualities', may not be a very accurate measure of the degree of importance employers attach to these skills."

Using a different measure of skill requirements, Holzer (1996) also failed to find a strong link between soft skill requirements and the racial composition of the work force. Holzer did find that the employment of African American males is significantly limited in jobs that require cognitive skills, but employment of black women is not limited in such jobs. Holzer also observed that the performance of daily tasks requiring interactive skills does not limit black employment.

Another possible interpretation of the missing link between soft skills requirements and minority employment is that employers are using the "soft skills deficit" to rationalize discrimination against blacks. With no racial discrimination, but with perceived differences in soft skills, one would expect to see a sorting of African American workers into jobs where soft skills are less important. Fewer African Americans would be expected to work in retailing (where 88 percent of employers in Moss and Tilly's survey mentioned soft skills first among the most important skills) and more African Americans in manufacturing (where only 21 percent of firms mentioned soft skills first). However, in the four industries represented in the Moss and Tilly survey (auto parts manufacturing, retail clothing, insurance, and the public sector), only auto parts manufacturing had significantly lower black employment.

A third possibility is that the Moss and Tilly analysis does not sufficiently account for the impact of class or neighborhood on the employment decision. Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991) observe that while some employers blend notions of class and race, others make clear class distinctions among black workers. If employers judge the soft skills of an individual based on neighborhood, then the relationship between black employment and soft skills could be weak and the relationship between soft skills and the employment of black workers from specific neighborhoods quite strong. For exam-

ple, an employer might give a high rating to the soft skills of black workers from a middle class community but a low rating to workers from a low-income housing project. If the employer in this example considered soft skills important, he or she might hire the same proportion of black workers as other workers while hiring significantly fewer residents from the housing project. Moss and Tilly do not investigate whether such patterns occur.

Whatever the interpretation of the Moss and Tilly results, their findings cast doubt on the importance of a soft skills deficit as an obstacle to the employment of urban minority workers. It is also important to note that less than half of employers expressed negative attitudes about minority workers. The next section of this report investigates whether the soft skills deficit perceived by 30 to 40 percent of employers is real or imagined.

Is There a Soft Skills Deficit Among Minorities?

Because soft skills are so difficult to assess, little direct evidence is available to corroborate or refute the negative stereotypes of employers. An extensive search of the literature found information on only two categories of soft skills—thinking/cognitive skills and personal qualities/work ethic. In both instances, the evidence of racial differences is a subject of intense dispute.

Thinking/Cognitive Skills

George Farkas, Paula England, Keven Vicknair, and Barbara Kilbourne (1997) argue that the lower average cognitive skill levels of African American and Mexican American men "explain a substantial proportion of the earnings gap between these groups and European Americans." According to these researchers, racial and ethnic differences in cognitive skill lead to occupational sorting and to earnings differences within occupations. African Americans and Mexican Americans occupy jobs that require less cognitive skill than jobs held by European Americans with similar education and work experience. These occupations pay lower wages than those that require greater skill. Within occupations, moreover, workers with lower levels of cognitive ability receive lower pay. In her study of the pay gap between African Americans and whites, June O'Neill (1990) reaches a similar conclusion. She finds that differences in cognitive ability explain a substantial portion of the racial difference in earnings even with controls for education and experience.

A critical issue in these studies is how cognitive skills are measured. Farkas et al. (1997) use the combined score on the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery of subtests of the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). These are tests of word knowledge, paragraph comprehension, arithmetic reasoning, and math knowledge. O'Neill uses the total AFQT score. Despite evidence that scores on standardized tests such as the AFQT predict job performance (Wigdor and Green 1991), social scientists disagree about the use of these scores to explain racial differences in earnings. Farkas et al. (1997), who found a positive, statistically significant relationship between the test scores and earnings even when controlling for educational attainment, argue that the tests are appropriate because the scores do not systematically underpredict the performance of minorities. Critics argue that the tests are culturally biased because they measure exposure to the values of the white middle class. When test scores are adjusted for this cultural

bias, these critics contend, their efficacy in explaining racial differences in earnings is reduced (Rodgers and Spriggs 1996; Maume, Cancio, and Evans 1996).

Personal Qualities/Work Ethic

Perhaps the most prevalent criticism of black workers is that they lack a work ethic. Employers cite problems with absenteeism and tardiness as evidence of a lack of motivation to work.

Economists measure willingness to work by examining a worker's reservation wage. The reservation wage is the lowest wage a worker would accept to leave unemployment for a job. Survey evidence reveals that young black males report reservation wages similar to those of their white counterparts when asked if they would accept a specific low-skilled job, such as dishwasher, at various hourly rates (Holzer 1996). When asked about the wages they would accept for jobs they were actually seeking, however, black men reported reservation wages 11 to 13 percent higher than those reported by whites with similar qualifications (Holzer 1996). Some observers interpret this finding as confirmation that young blacks are not interested in working for a living (Mead 1992), while others regard it as evidence that blacks are unwilling to lower their reservation wages to accommodate labor market discrimination (Holzer 1996).

Stephen Pettersen (1997) disputes both these interpretations, arguing that the ratio of the reservation wage to predicted or past wage is a poor measure of willingness to work. Reservation wages, according to Pettersen, reflect aspirations and perceptions of self worth. They do not determine what the jobless do when they are actually offered a job. Furthermore, using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Pettersen finds that white and black youth have similar reservation wages when past wage is held constant.

Absenteeism and tardiness provide alternative indicators of willingness to work. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey indicate that black youths are absent from work more often than white youths (Ferguson and Filer 1986). In a study of postal workers, however, Craig Zwerling and Hilary Silver (1992) found that black postal workers were less likely to be absent from their jobs than were their white counterparts. Some of the racial differences in absenteeism may reflect differences in job characteristics. Absenteeism is higher in jobs that are unpleasant, and black workers occupy a disproportionate share of those jobs. Studies of the determinants of tardiness produce similar results. Years of work experience and marriage reduce the incidence of tardiness, while holding a high-paying job and working excessive overtime increase tardiness (Leigh and Lust 1988). When researchers control for these factors, however, race is not a statistically significant explanatory variable (Leigh and Lust 1986, 1988).

To the extent that workers from disadvantaged communities live further from their jobs or have limited access to transportation, they may have a higher incidence of tardiness. This is a problem of distance and access, however, not one of motivation.

Summary and Implications

This report indicates that soft skills do matter to employers. In national assessments of the skill needs of U.S. employers, in focus group discussions, and in survey responses, employers consistently cite the importance of soft skills. Furthermore,

employers act as though soft skills matter. They pay more to workers who have higher cognitive skills and higher self-esteem. Employer reliance on the personal interview provides additional evidence that soft skills matter.

Soft skills are nontechnical skills, abilities, and traits required to function in a structured environment so as to (1) deliver information or services to customers and co-workers; (2) work effectively as a member of a team; (3) learn or acquire the technical skills required to perform a task; (4) inspire the confidence of supervisors and management; and (5) understand and adapt to the cultural norms of the workplace. Soft skills consist of thinking/cognitive skills, oral communication skills, personal qualities/work ethic, and interpersonal and teamwork skills. There appears to be two tiers of soft skills: communication skills, personal qualities, and interpersonal and teamwork skills are part of the first tier, while cognitive skills belong to the second.

Employers perceive that minority workers possess fewer soft skills than other entry level workers. Qualitative studies suggest that these negative stereotypes pose an obstacle to employment for African American workers, but statistical studies fall short of proving this hypothesis.

In the absence of direct measures of soft skills, it is difficult to assess the accuracy of employers' perceptions of the soft skills of minority workers. Even if employers' perceptions are incorrect, the problem for minority workers remains the same. If they possess the required soft skills, they must persuade the employer that they have them. If they do not possess soft skills, minority workers must acquire them and then persuade the employer that they have them.

One characteristic that distinguishes soft skills from other skills is that they are difficult to assess. Even in personal interviews with job applicants, employers must rely on nonverbal signals to infer personal qualities like motivation. Pre-employment tests provide little opportunity to assess interpersonal and teamwork skills. Hence, employers lack information about a worker's soft skills. Because this information is costly to obtain, employers are likely to engage in statistical discrimination. Statistical discrimination occurs when an employer assesses the characteristics of an individual based on a stereotype about a group to which the individual belongs. Imperfect information also leads employers to rely on recruitment methods, such as employee referrals, that will pre-screen employees for the requisite soft skills.

These findings suggest a three-part strategy for organizations providing training and placement services. First, they should develop the soft skills of individual workers who lack them. Second, they must develop a reputation with employers as a reliable source of workers who possess the requisite soft skills. Third, they need to identify and develop work environments that complement and enhance the soft skills of individual workers. This involves matching workers to jobs and, in some instances, involving co-workers and supervisors in soft skills training. For example, a worker with strong teamwork and cognitive skills, but poor communication skills, might function better in manufacturing than in clerical work or retail sales. A useful guide for those interested in implementing this strategy is *Soft Skills Training: An Annotated Guide to Selected Programs*, a companion volume to this study available from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

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Part II. Soft Skills: An Annotated Bibliography

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Part II.
Soft Skills: An Annotated Bibliography

Introduction

Several authors (Moss and Tilly 1995, 1996; Wilson 1997) have suggested that a "soft skills" deficit may be an important factor in explaining the employment problems of urban youth, particularly black males. Moss and Tilly observe that the demand for soft skills is growing and cite evidence that employers perceive young African American males as lacking in soft skills relative to other demographic groups. Wilson, in his book on joblessness in inner city communities, reports that employers view black youth as lacking in work ethic, honesty, and dependability. Even the popular media have been publicizing soft skills. *Sixty Minutes* aired a segment in May 1997 on STRIVE, an employment program in New York City that focuses on the development of social skills.

This annotated bibliography is based on a survey of the published literature (in English) on "soft skills." Until the early 1990s, research on soft skills concentrated on the job requirements of management employees. The earliest reference reported here comes from the military. The U.S. Continental Army Command included a definition of soft skills in its official training regulations in 1972. In the 1980s, business periodicals in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain published articles on the soft skills that managers and the merits of assessing those skills. Periodicals targeted to information systems professionals stressed that even computer jocks needed soft skills. The term even emerged in evaluations of outdoor experience programs such as Outward Bound.

Although these articles characterize a variety of specific skills as "soft," they are primarily relevant to management and professional workers. Nevertheless, a review of this literature can provide a starting point for discussing relevant soft skills for less-educated workers. For example, even the management literature cites the lack of clarity in the definition of soft skills as a major problem for assessment and training. Strebler reports that managers in Great Britain complain about the vagueness of behavioral descriptors such as "dealing with people." Strebler and Whitmore note that the demonstration of soft skills is situation specific. Individuals relate to each other in different ways depending on the context of the interaction. In his analysis of soft skills assessment for army officers, Whitmore observes, "Whether or not a worker behaves in a 'motivated' fashion depends largely on how other people in his work environment treat him."

This bibliography organizes the literature on soft skills into seven categories:

1. Defining Soft Skills;
2. The Demand for Soft Skills;
3. Soft Skills Training Practices;
4. Assessment and Evaluation of Soft Skills Training;
5. Soft Skills and Formal Education;

6. Soft Skills and Gender; and

7. Soft Skills and Race.

The first category, "Defining Soft Skills," includes articles that offer formal definitions of the term "soft skills" or attempt to list specific skills that are "soft." Articles grouped under "The Demand for Soft Skills" document the increasing demand for soft skills and provide some discussion of the underlying causes. Among the explanations offered are (1) the increase in service sector jobs, which require greater customer interaction; (2) the restructuring of organizations to eliminate middle management; and (3) the growing emphasis on teamwork and decision making on the shop floor.

The articles in the "Soft Skills Training Practices" category describe specific training methods, while those listed under "Assessment and Evaluation of Soft Skills Training" discuss how to evaluate the effectiveness of those training methods. The articles on training practices share a common emphasis on simulations and problem solving exercises. Two articles describe computer software for soft skills training. The articles on assessment and evaluation tend to be too general to be of practical use. Only two of the assessment studies—Pine and Tingley's "ROI of Soft Skills Training" and Pitstick's "The Wilderness Discovery"—describe evaluations of specific training programs.

The section on "Soft Skills and Formal Education" includes four articles that describe the efforts of MBA programs to include soft skills in their curricula. The Murnane and Levy book focuses on elementary and secondary education, while the Murray dissertation assesses the soft skills content of a community college marketing program. "Soft Skills and Gender" discusses the intersection between soft skills and traits that are considered "feminine." Finally, "Soft Skills and Race" describes the research that provided the impetus for this project.

1. Defining Soft Skills

Brackenberg, Mark. "Theories, Practices and Benefits of Debriefing in Outdoor Education." *Journal of Outdoor Education* 26 (1992-93): 3-11.

This article lists 10 soft skills that debriefing facilitators need.

Fry, John P., and Paul G. Whitmore. 1972. "What Are Soft Skills?" Paper presented at the CONARC Soft Skills Conference, sponsored by the U.S. Continental Army Command, Fort Bliss, Texas, December 12-13, 1972. Published in *Soft Skills: Definition, Behavioral Model Analysis, Training Procedures* (HumRRO Professional Paper 3-74) by Paul Whitmore and John Fry (Alexandria, Va.: Human Resources Research Organization, 1974).

In i[illegible] 1972 training manual, the U.S. Continental Army Command (CONARC) officially defines "soft skills" as "job-related skills involving actions affecting primarily people and paper, e.g., inspecting troops, supervising office personnel, conducting studies, preparing maintenance reports, preparing efficiency reports, designing bridge structures." To ascertain what the term "soft skills" actually meant to the CONARC staff officers, Fry and Whitmore asked the officers to rate common officer functions on three dimensions: (1) degree of interaction with machines; (2) degree of specificity of the behavior, action, or process to be performed; and (3) degree of uncertainty about the physical and social environment, as well as the consequences of alternative courses of action. Based on the

officer survey, Fry and Whitmore define soft skills as important job-related skills that involve little or no interaction with machines and whose application on the job is quite generalized because the situation or context contains a great deal of uncertainty. The task of reading and interpreting a map, for example, requires little interaction with machines. Nevertheless, it requires a very specific application of skills and involves little uncertainty. Using Fry and Whitmore's definition, therefore, interpreting and reading a map is a hard skill. A soft skill, in contrast, is a task such as "establishes management practices which develop all subordinate personnel into a cooperative and productive unit." The task involves no interaction with machines and requires no specific action or process. There is little information about the task's physical and social context, and the consequences of alternative ways of accomplishing the job are not well known.

Whitmore, Paul G. "The Behavioral Model as a Tool for Analyzing Soft Skills." Paper presented at the CONARC Soft Skills Conference, sponsored by the U.S. Continental Army Command,Fort Bliss, Texas, December 12-13, 1972. Published in *Soft Skills: Definition, Behavioral Model Analysis, Training Procedures* (HumRRO Professional Paper 3-74) by Paul Whitmore and John Fry (Alexandria, Va.: Human Resources Research Organization, 1974).

This paper describes a systems engineering approach to the problem of analyzing the soft skills required to perform a job. The author stresses the importance of environmental factors, including the treatment received from supervisors and fellow workers, in determining worker motivation. The problem for the systems engineer, according to the author, is to design a behavior system in which people interact in a way that enhances everyone's work behavior.

2. The Demand for Soft Skills

Appleton, Elaine L. "How to Survive ERP." *Datamation* 43 (May 1997): 50-3.

This article argues that the implementation of enterprise resource planning (ERP) requires soft skills—particularly team building and communication skills.

Cafasso, Rosemary. "Selling Your Soft Side (People Skills Will Win You the Job)." *Computerworld* 30 (1 April 1996): 97.

According to this article, information systems (IS) managers list people skills as essential for IS professionals. This article advises the job-seeker how to develop and demonstrate soft skills.

Caminiti, Susan. "What Team Leaders Need to Know." *Fortune* 131 (20 February 1995): 93-4.

The article describes the concern of managers that development of soft skills may not pay off for their careers in the long term. "They worry that all of the 'soft skills' so essential for success as a team leader—communication, conflict resolution, and coaching—might not be impressive on a resume."

Capelli, Peter, and Maria Iannozzi. "Rethinking the Skills Gap: Is It Craft or

Character?" In *EQW Issues* (1995), published by the National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, University of Pennsylvania.

The authors briefly summarize evidence from recent surveys of increased employer demand for soft skills. Authors argue that increased demand for soft skills derives from the introduction of high-performance work systems: "High-performance work systems 'flatten' the pyramid of traditional organization by cutting out layers of management and transferring a great deal of decision making from managers at the tops of hierarchies to hands-on employees involved in groups or teams." Academic skills, according to the authors, have become less important to success than behavioral skills and attitudes. The authors identify three categories of work-relevant attitudes—disposition, motivation, and willingness to sacrifice self for the good of the organization. The authors conclude by urging greater emphasis on soft skills training for elementary and secondary students.

Davis, Dwight B. "Hard demand for soft skills." *Datamation* 39 (15 January 1993): 28-32.

This article reports that companies who employ information systems professionals are demanding that they possess soft skills as well as technical proficiency. "Soft skills include writing memos, running meetings, creating budgets and action plans, listening closely to associates."

Filipczak, Bob. "Concurrent Engineering: A Team by Any Other Name?" *Training* 33 (August 1996): 54-9.

This article argues that the use of "concurrent engineering" or "integrated product development" in the design of new products in high-tech companies requires soft skills such as "communication, conflict resolution, and leadership."

Menagh, Melanie. "Made to Order." *Computerworld* 30 (19 August 1996): 78.

Author lists soft skills demanded of information systems professionals in the Pittsburgh area.

3. Soft Skills Training Practices

Fry, John P. "Procedures for Implementing Soft Skill Training in CONARC Schools." Paper presented at the CONARC Soft Skills Conference, sponsored by the U.S. Continental Army Command,Fort Bliss, Texas, December 12-13, 1972. Published in *Soft Skills: Definition, Behavioral Model Analysis, Training Procedures* (HumRRO Professional Paper 3-74) by Paul Whitmore and John Fry (Alexandria, Va.: Human Resources Research Organization, 1974).

The paper discusses soft skills training in an officer training program and argues that the best approach is one based on problem solving rather than memorization.

Heathman, Dena J., and Brian H. Kleiner. "Training and Technology: The Future is Now." *Training and Development* 45 (September 1991): 49-51.

The article describes the application of computer-assisted training to develop soft skills.

Rossett, Allison, and Jeremy Barnett. "Designing Under the Influence (Need for Instructional Design Using Multimedia Systems)." *Training* 33 (December 1996): 34-7.

The article describes soft skills multimedia training packages.

Swinburne, Penny. "Management with a Personal Touch." *People Management* 1 (6 April 1995): 38-9.

The author suggests how managers can become more people oriented by changing the way they relate to workers.

Welch, Jilly. "Delegates Find Soft Skill Ideas Hard to Digest." *Personnel Management* 2 (4 April 1996): 14.

This is a report on presentations at Europe's HRD (human resource development) week. Two techniques, competency modeling and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), were featured topics. The author notes that management appears skeptical about techniques for soft skills training. A human resource director is quoted as saying, "It seems to be jargon built on a solid base of jargon."

Wilson, Linda. "Yearn to Learn." *Computerworld* (June 1997): 41-3.

This article briefly summarizes training practices of companies included in *Computerworld* magazine's "1997 '100 Best Places to Work'" listing. The article notes Xerox's use of a just-in-time formula for all training, including soft skills training. It also highlights mentoring programs as a method to reinforce "soft skills," especially leadership skills.

4. Assessment and Evaluation of Soft Skills and Soft Skills Training

Burkhart, Jennifer. "Evaluating Workplace Education Program Effectiveness." ERIC, ED 399435. Unpublished report. Colorado State Department of Education, n.d. This guide gives special attention to the importance of evaluating "soft skills" training.

"Evaluating Soft Skills Training" (Review of a videotape of trainees handling simulated leadership situations). *Training* 28 (September 1991): 14-15.

The article reports that Mohr Development, a consulting firm from Stamford, Connecticut, uses before-and-after videotapes to evaluate the effectiveness of a soft skills training course. Judges assess tapes of the trainees in simulated leadership situations.

Georges, James C. "The Myth of Soft Skills Training." *Training* 33 (January 1996): 48-50.

The author argues that it is difficult to show concrete results from "soft skills" training courses because they involve education (which increases intellectual awareness of a subject) instead of training (which makes someone proficient at the execution of a given task).

Gordon, Jack. "Measuring the 'Goodness' of Training." *Training* 28 (August 1991): 19-25.

The article describes a method of evaluation outlined by Donald L. Kirkpatrick, a training consultant and former professor at the University of Wisconsin, and discusses whether this method can be applied to training in "soft skills." Kirkpatrick identifies four levels of evaluation. Level one is the measurement of the trainees' reactions to the course, usually at the end of the training session. Level two is the measurement of learning, i.e., did trainees actually acquire the knowledge or skills that were taught. Level three is an evaluation of whether trainees are using their new skills and knowledge on the job. Level four is an assessment of the business results, i.e., are the trained factory workers producing more widgets per hour, with fewer defects, than untrained workers?

Mirabile, Richard, David Caldwell, and Charles O'Reilly. "Soft Skills, Hard Numbers (Quantify Manager's Competence)." *Training* 24 (August 1987): 53-6.

This paper describes an approach for defining competencies in soft skills for managers and for assessing the soft skills of individual managers. The article stresses the need to tailor training to the needs of specific individuals and departments.

Phipps, Maurice Leonard. "An Assessment of a Systematic Approach to Teaching Outdoor Leadership in Expedition Settings." Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1986.

This dissertation evaluates the use of a systematic approach to teach soft skills for outdoor leadership. The dissertation uses a case study method with comparison groups. The study found that a systematic approach improved leadership.

Pine, Judith, and Judith C. Tingley. "ROI of Soft Skills Training." *Training* 30 (February 1993): 55-8.

This article describes an evaluation of a soft skills training program—a team building exercise at the Garrett Engine Division of Allied Signal.

Pitstick, Randall C. "The Wilderness Discovery: The Meaning and Effects of a Seven-Day Wilderness Experience Program for Youth-At-Risk in the Federal Job Corps Program." Ph.D. diss., University of Idaho, 1995.

Wilderness Discovery was a seven-day backpacking wilderness experience designed to impart soft skills to at-risk youth in the Federal Job Corps program. The dissertation explores two major research questions: (1) what was the meaning of the program from the point of view of the participants and (2) what effect did the program have on the participants. To address the second question, the author compared participants to non-participants using termination data from Job Corps centers and from a questionnaire administered six months after the trip. The study found no statistically significant differences between the treatment group and the control group.

Zavodsky, Richard John. "Empowerment, Commitment, and Skills Training." Ph.D. diss., The Fielding Institute, 1995.

The author conducted a survey of attitudes toward soft skills training in an engineering office and examined the correlation between those perceptions and seniority.

5. Soft Skills and Formal Education

Bongiorno, Lori. "Ivy and Innovation: B-Schools Try Harder." *Business Week* (7 June 1993): 114-15.

The article reports that MBA programs are adding courses on "soft skills."

Crawford, Michael. "Cash or Crash?" *Canadian Business* 67 (April 1994): 36-8.

In response to corporate skepticism about the value of MBA programs, educators are emphasizing the development of soft skills in their programs. These include leadership, problem solving, strategic planning, team building, and organizational behavior.

Dutton, Gail. "MBAs: On Target." *Chemical Marketing Reporter* 246 (24 October 1994): SR12.

The article reports on the chemical industry's satisfaction with changes in MBA programs. In reference to new MBAs, "They have the knowledge needed to deal with the realities of diversity in personnel, plant location, products, and regulations, and have a mindset that allows them to handle a product from conception through design, manufacturing and marketing, which is a marked change from even four years ago, when MBAs typically lacked the soft skills needed for communicating clearly, developing teamwork, and managing diversity."

Littlefield, David. "Firms Forge New Partnership with Higher Education." *People Management* 1 (4 May 1995): 12.

This article describes new cooperative ventures between businesses and universities to provide high-level programs in soft skills such as change management and business process reengineering.

Murnane, Richard J., and Frank Levy. *Teaching the New Basic Skills: Principles for Educating Children to Thrive in a Changing Economy*. Simon and Schuster, 1996.

This book includes soft skills in a broad list of skills needed to compete effectively in the U.S. economy. It discusses how schools can change to teach those skills and provides examples. Included in the list of soft skills are the ability to work in groups and ability to make effective oral and written presentations.

Murray, John Leith. "Identification of Emerging New Workplace Skills For Community College Marketing Students, As Identified by Employers and Graduates: Implications for Community College Programs." Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1994.

The author conducted a survey of marketing graduates of a community college and their employers, asking them to rank 60 skills essential to work performance. The community college graduates were also queried about the degree to which they learned those skills in the college marketing program.

6. Soft Skills and Gender

Bartley, Natalie L. "Outward Bound Leadership Model: An Exploratory Study of Leadership Variables." Speech and conference paper, from the proceedings of the 1998 National Conference on Outdoor Recreation. Available through ERIC, ED 357936.

This paper describes a field study of 29 mountain course instructors at the Colorado Outward Bound school. It explores the relationship between gender and soft skills, which are defined as competencies necessary for interpersonal helping skills, as opposed to hard skills which are technical competencies. The instructors were pre-tested using questionnaires and inventories, including the Soft Skills Background Questionnaire. Students attending the course were then asked to rate each instructor. Instructors were also rated by supervisors. Prior soft skills training was positively associated with course outcomes. Personality was associated with soft skills training.

Strebler, Marie. "Soft Skills and Hard Questions." *People Management* 3 (29 May 1997): 20-4.

This paper notes the irony that although women are stereotyped as having stronger interpersonal skills than men, the increased emphasis on the interpersonal skills of managers has not led to the advancement of women in managerial positions. The explanation lies in the lack of a clear definition of soft skills and the subjectivity inherent in assessment. The article concludes that interpersonal skills are defined differently if a more masculine view of leadership is adopted.

7. Soft Skills and Race

Holzer, Harry. *What Employers Want: Job Prospects for Less-Educated Workers*. New York City: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996.

This book investigates both demand and supply in the market for less-educated workers. Although the term "soft skills" is not used explicitly, the book does examine the relationship between the interactive skills required to perform a job and the employment of minority men and women. For each job, the author uses survey data to evaluate the time spent on four specific tasks: interaction with customers, reading and writing, arithmetic, and using computers. The author concludes that the employment of black males is significantly limited by the tasks that must be performed daily, especially the tasks that require cognitive skills. The evidence is less strong for tasks that require interactive skills.

Moss, Philip, and Chris Tilly. "'Soft' Skills and Race: An Investigation of Black Men's Employment Problems." *Work and Occupations* 23 (August 1996): 252-76.

This article reports on the results of 66 face-to-face, open-ended interviews with 75 employer representatives at 55 organizations in 1991 and 1992. The interviews focused on the largest category of entry level jobs, those requiring no more than a high school diploma. The purpose of the study was to learn how employment gatekeepers perceived soft skills in relation to hiring black men. The authors define "soft skills" as "skills,

abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than to formal or technical knowledge." Specific skills cited include interaction skills (ability to interact with customers, coworkers and supervisors, including friendliness, teamwork, ability to fit in, grooming, and attire) and motivational skills (enthusiasm, positive work attitude, commitment, dependability, and willingness to learn). The study found evidence that the demand for soft skills is increasing, primarily because of increased reliance on teamwork. Eight-six percent of firms included soft skills in their list of most important hiring criteria. Many employers see black men as lacking in soft skills. Thirty-two percent of employers described black men as defensive, hostile, or having a difficult "attitude." Forty percent of employers described black men as unmotivated employees. The study concludes with a discussion of these perceptions and the role of racial stereotypes in this process.

Moss, Philip, and Chris Tilly. "Skills and Race in Hiring: Quantitative Findings from Face-to- Face Interviews." *Eastern Economic Journal* 21 (Summer 1995): 357-74.

This paper uses data from interviews with employers in Los Angeles and Detroit to investigate the impact of soft skills on the probability of employment for black males. The study also looks at the demand for soft skills as a determinant of an employer's hiring practices. The study found that (1) in soft skill intensive jobs (retail, or jobs where respondents rate soft skills as important), employers relied least on employee referrals and (2) employers that mentioned soft skills first in their description of most important qualities were less likely to conduct written tests and somewhat more likely to emphasize the interview (but the effect was small and insignificant). Contrary to the authors' expectations, they found no quantitative evidence that soft skill requirements screen out black men. They attribute this finding, however, to problems with the measurement of soft skill requirements.

Wilson, William Julius. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.

The book focuses on the causes and consequences of the high rate of joblessness in black inner city neighborhoods. Chapter Five, "The Meaning and Significance of Race," reports the results of a survey of Chicago area employers. The survey finds that employers have negative attitudes about the work ethic, dependability, and honesty of black youth, and that these negative attitudes reduce their willingness to consider black youth for employment.